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ABSTRACT

To improve speech communication education at the secondary school level, high school and college teachers must focus attention on speaking and listening content and on research having direct applications to speech instruction. Three approaches to curriculum planning have weakened secondary school level speech programs: the popularization of minicourses to the detriment of a basic skills foundation; the tendency among new instructors to present what they learned in college, with little attention to student needs; and teacher determination of the curriculum without objective criteria. To improve the secondary school speech curriculum, high school and college instructors must collaborate. Methods of building this collaboration include establishing partnerships between college speech departments and local high school programs that focus on student needs, the application of research to those needs, and the improvement of instruction. In addition to giving preservice speech and language arts teachers the confidence and knowledge to teach secondary school speech education effectively, colleges can recognize outstanding high school speech programs, teachers, and students. (MM)

The Need for Definition, Development, and Evaluation of Speech Communication Programs

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Over the past several decades we in speech communication education have complained about the lack of required speech courses in high school, the lack of definition of speaking and listening as basic skills, the instruction of speech by English teachers with no speech training, and the lack of articulation of speech communication programs between secondary schools and colleges and universities.[1] Maybe the speech curricula in United States secondary schools have given us something to complain about or maybe we in institutions of higher education have contributed to the problems of secondary school curricula of the past two decades. It seems that three approaches to curriculum planning have been perpetuated: the smorgasbord approach, the hand-me-down approach, and teacher determined curriculum. These approaches have contributed to the problem identified by the National Commission on Excellence in Education that "secondary school curricula have been homogenized, diluted, and diffused to the point that they no longer have a central purpose."[2]

The smorgasbord approach to curriculum development came about in the 1960's when U.S. schools, for the first time, had more diverse learners in the schools and were faced with the problem of trying to keep students who traditionally would have dropped out to be interested and to remain in schools. The pleas for relevant, short-term condensed courses led to instruction in popularized topics in the framework of mini-courses. Mini-courses or semester courses

abounded in topics such as intrapersonal communication, soap operas, advertising, and stage fights and falls. While these topics in and of themselves were not bad, the combination of such courses and the isolated instruction of these topics did not add up to adequate preparation in needed basic skills. The availability of a smorgasboard curriculum, freedom of students to choose their own courses, and reduction of specified high school graduation requirements have led to the criticism of students' inability to speak, listen, and think critically.[3]

Colleges and universities, in part, have been responsible for the hand-me-down approach to curriculum development in the high schools. The study of communication has evolved in the past quarter century and has actually replaced the study of speaking and listening in many colleges and universities. Such a rapid expansion of the discipline has stimulated many university faculty members to address such topics as interpersonal communication, family communication, organizational communication, negotiations, ethnographic studies of communication in cultures, and the effect of media. The enthusiasm of college instructors for these topics typically infects those students who are preparing to teach in our secondary schools. In fact, in some universities it is possible for prospective speech teachers to graduate without completing courses in public speaking, group discussion, debate, listening, interviewing, or oral interpretation. Thus, when faced with the prospect of

developing or teaching an established curriculum in the high school, many newly trained speech teachers are unprepared or uninterested in teaching topics which have not been part of their college curricula. These new teachers often teach what they have learned in college in the high school without attention to the questions of (1) what are the basic speaking, listening and critical thinking skills needed by all high school students, and (2) what are the best ways to ensure that instruction in these skills brings about the desired competencies.

Others outside of the communication discipline do not hesitate to identify critical communication skills needed by high school students. A myriad of commissions, committees, states and professional organizations have called for the inclusion of speaking, listening, and the teaching of critical thinking in the high school curriculum. The following recent reports urge the teaching of speaking and listening: (1) A Nation At Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform (1983), Department of Education by the National Commission on Excellence in Education;[4] (2) the College Entrance Examination Board's report on Academic Preparation for College: What Students Need to Know and Be Able To Do (1983);[5] (3) The Council for Basic Education Checklist (1983);[6] (4) The Task Force on Education for Economic Growth: Action for Excellence: A Comprehensive Plan to Improve Our Nation's Schools (1983) by the Education Commission of the States;[7] (5) state reports from

Michigan, Washington, Florida, California, Oregon, and Texas; and (6) the Speech Communication Association "Minimal Speaking and Listening Competencies for High School Graduates".[8] The Report of Secondary Education in America by the Carnegie Foundation calls for a required one-semester speech course which would include:

> group discussion, formal debate, public speaking, and reading literature aloud . . . [Boyer says] the goal is not just effective self-expression; but also is reflective thinking. Students' oral comments must also be accompanied by careful analysis and critique by teachers.[9]

Thus, for there to be clearer articulation between high school and college speech communication programs we need to define what is meant by speech communication and to distinguish between courses and curriculum which are best taught in the secondary schools and those which should be left for post-secondary education.

The specification of what should be taught in a high school speech course from external groups may become the dominant method of curriculum definition of the next decade, but it is not the way in which curriculum has been most frequently defined. Individual teachers have been the major determiners of high school curricula. Phil Cusick, Institute for Research on Teaching (IRT) researcher, conducted a field study in two large Detroit area high schools and reported:

> that [secondary] schools have given up on any generalized idea of what constitutes an education and have instead given control of the process over to individual teachers who then strick an agreement with sets of students. [He then goes on to say] . . . that may not be a bad thing. Certainly the current system provides the specialization and diversity many educators say is needed to meet each student's individual needs. The problem with the system, according to Cusick, is that if students lack maturity of adult guidance, they may slip through it without even the rudiments of an education. . . . Says Cusick, "we never found anyone who subjected his or her beliefs to an empirical test or a test of consensus among the faculty." . . . many went so far as to say, "What I teach is good for them." These were the teachers who would design courses based on their own interest and, by following the appropriate procedures of their school; had those courses incorporated into the curriculum. One teacher created an elective course on the philosophy of Aristotle and Plato because it interested him. He nurtured it to a point where he taught three classes of it every day.[10]

The results Cusick reported are in keeping with the previous findings of resarch which examined the external and internal forces on teachers to define the curricula. Floden said, "since teachers

have the final say on the content presented to pupils, teacher decisions about what content to present probably have a substantial effect on the pattern of student achievement."[11] They found that of the external pressures to add topics to the elementary school curriculum the following affected teachers decisions:

1. Publication by central administration of a set of objectives;
2. Standardized test results published;
3. Textbook content;
4. Discussions of the teacher with the principal;
5. Upper grade teachers;
6. Parents.[12]

Buchman and Schmidt examined the internal forces which effect the content taught in elementary classrooms. They found that teachers' allocation of time to specific subjects were related to their judgements about what emphasis they believed the content should be given and their enjoyment of teaching the subject. However, "teachers do not seem to necessarily spend less time on a subject just because they find it difficult to teach."[13] If, indeed, speech teachers have had limited university preparation in the teaching of public speaking, non-speech trained teachers are teaching speech, or teachers do not perceive a need for speech training, instruction in speaking and listening is likely to be de-emphasized. Also, speech is wedged into an already full English or language arts

curriculum, and if, as a recent survey indicates, speech textbooks are infrequently or never used in 61% of the speech classrooms,[14] the content of speech communication in high schools may be ill-defined.

Definition and development of speech communication curriculum requires (1) carefully and specifically defined objectives, (2) development of courses and programs using the most up-to-date knowledge available about subject matter, principles, and skills, and (3) use of the results of research on teaching to present new knowledge in the most effective means possible. We in speech communication at the high school and college levels need to collaborate to identify and examine the key issues in teaching speaking and listening. We need to incorporate what has been learned about developing functional communication competence at all developmental levels into a coherent K-12 curriculum. We need to examine the literature regarding time-on-task[15] to consider how we can maximize the use of class time to enhance students development and practice of speech skills (i.e., Is it the best use of students time for them to listen to each other's speeches as opposed to giving more speeches?) We need to look at the research in teacher explanation[16] to determine what implications exist for modeling speeches and directly teaching significant communication principles. In essence, we need to return to a focus on the speaking and listening content and the educational research which could bear on its instruction.

Also, if we want to develop speech programs which respond to the reports, we need to improve our ability to measure speech proficiency and progressive competence, and to distinguish between speaking and listening competence and incompetence. Setting educational objectives for students which can be measured will assist in curriculum development. The authors of Research Within Reach: Oral and Written Communication cited Loban as saying, "the language arts curriculum inevitably shrinks or expands to the boundaries of what is evaluated."[17] They go on to say "one reason for the neglect of oral communication instruction in American public schools is the lack of appropriate measurement technology."[18] If secondary schools and colleges and universities could collaborate and bring together those measurement and research knowledge and skills they have, evaluation of speech communication could be accomplished.

The goal of developing curriculum on speaking and listening cannot be accomplished in a serendipitous fashion or a one-shot in-service approach. Rather we can only begin to impact the articulation between high school and college university speech communication programs if faculty in colleges take seriously the strengthening of relationships with K-12 schools. Ernest Boyer in his 1980 address at the American Association for Higher Education Conference,

pointed to the void he perceived between the colleges and the schools. The university's disregard for the lower grades, he maintained, impedes the nurture of the academy itself. The reciprocal process of American education, Boyer insisted, is fragmented and distorted when profesors ignore developments in the elementary and secondary schools: "It's such a simple point - the need for close collaboration - and yet in recent years this school/college relationship has been essentially ignored. . . . We cannot have excellence in higher education if we do not have excellence in school.[19]

One way in which close collaboration and building of excellence could be accomplished is if each college department of speech communication in this country would establish a partnership with a local high school to join with the teachers to develop and enhance their speech communication program. Such an adoption must be done in a collaborative mode with mutual respect and trust, regular communication, and with both parties accepting the responsibility for the direction and success or failure of the project. Working together, faculty in speech could accomplish the following objectives: (1) develop an integrated and coordinated K-12-college curriculum which identifies the principles and skills to be taught at each level [note: a similar recommendation was called for by communication conferees at the New Orleans Conference on Resarch and Instructional Development in 1968[20]]; (2) study the impact of the curriculum on students; (3) assess the relationship

of skill in speaking and listening to skill in reading and writing, critical thinking, self-confidence, and other academic success; (4) assess different methods of teaching speech, for example by a) using the explanation model, or b) assessing the affects of different types of evaluation on student's success; (5) study the effects of different in-service teacher training models which enhance teacher's abilities to teach speaking and listening; and (6) work to strengthen the communication skills of all classroom teachers since they provide the models that influence our students. If each college that currently provides a speech curriculum established such a partnership with one high school, 446 high school programs could be affected immediately.[2] Since change occurs at the local level, not at the national or state level, this model could maximize the chance of brining about clearer articulation of programs in high schools and colleges.

On a different note, the charge to universities is clear regarding the pre-service preparation of teachers of speech, English and language arts. If teachers determine the curriculum, then it is the responsibility of colleges and universities to prepare teachers with: (1) positive attitudes toward the teaching of speech; (2) confidence in their abilities to teach and evaluate speech and to enhance the skills of their students; and (3) knowledge of the content they will teach in the seondary schools, not merely of other interesting, but less basic apects of communication. If speech is to be taught in every

class, as some propose, then State legislation will be needed to mandate the preparation of all teachers. Perhaps we might go to a model like that required in Michigan of preparing all teachers to be teachers of reading. We could expect all teachers to be teachers of speaking and listening but only with proper preparation. Not to train teachers to teach speech is to endorse the position that speech is an act which people do naturally and thus need no specialized training to do better. We must not be guilty of perpetuating this misconception.

Finally, colleges can aid high schools by recognizing outstanding speech programs, teachers and students. Criteria for awarding schools, teachers, and students such recognition could be created. The visibility of the programs, teachers, and students could enhance the public confidence in our schools, as well as could reinforce their belief that speaking is an important skill which merits special instruction. While traditionally scholarships were given for debate and forensics, new scholarships might be given to outstanding teachers to return for graduate study in speech or communication or to outstanding college-bound students who intend to enter the teaching profession.

We need to meet the challenge of putting to use the communication principles we profess by working closely with those institutions which can make a difference in students' speaking and listening competencies. We in post-secondary institutions

suffer when students lack these basic skills and thus, have an obligation to work with secondary institutions to enhance the instruction of these skills. To accomplish mutually beneficial goals and clearer articulation between secondary schools and colleges and universities, we need to work together to define, develop, evaluate, and recognize speech communication in the secondary schools.

Endnotes

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